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March 8, 2004
ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION
DOCUMENT CONTROL

Mr. Ernest Johnson
Director, Utilities Division
Arizona Corporation Commission
1200 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Re: Arizona-American Water Company; Docket Nos. WS-01303A-02-0867;
WS-01303A-02-0868; WS-01303A-02-0869; WS-01303A-02-0870;
WS-01303A-02-0908

Dear Mr. Johnson:

This morning I came across the attached article about the high level of nitrates in the water in Desert Hills. The fire chief of Desert Hills has alleged that the water is unsafe and that the Arizona-American Water Company has failed to adequately warn its customers. This causes me great concern and has compelled me to ask the following questions:

- (1) What is the immediate health risk to the people in that area?
- (2) If there is a public health concern with the water in Desert Hills, what must be done to immediately remedy the situation?
- (3) Has this matter been addressed in the rate case?

Time is of the essence, please respond as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

William A. Mundell, Commissioner
Arizona Corporation Commission

cc: Steve Olea
Brian McNeil
Docket Control

Attachment

Arizona Corporation Commission
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Concern lingers over Desert Hills water

By Mark Hall

The chief of the Desert Hills Fire Department is concerned Arizona American Water Company has not given proper notification to customers whose drinking water contains high levels of nitrates.

"As far as I know the water is still unsafe to drink," said Chief Mat Espinoza. "I don't think Arizona American took this very seriously, but there are certain people it will still affect. I don't feel Arizona American has met their obligation to notify people."

On Feb. 19, Kevin Tilden, spokesman for Arizona American Water, said the company would be sending inserts with customers' next billing statements updating them on the situation. However, Espinoza said he didn't receive an insert in the fire department's water bill.

The bill, which charges for water usage though Feb. 26, makes no mention of nitrate levels. In addition, it states: "Arizona-American takes great pride in the water we deliver to you. Our water meets or exceeds all standards."

Tilden said Tuesday that the bill inserts would begin with the billing cycle that started Monday. He added that small children still should not drink the water, however, he said it isn't dangerous for adults.

Espinoza said another reason he is not happy because the company is seeking a rate increase through the Arizona Corporation Commission. "Should they be able to raise their rates if they are not putting out a good product?" he asked.

Tilden said routine testing on Feb. 13 showed levels of 12 milligrams per liter, slightly exceeding the nitrate standard of 10 mg/L.

Infants under six months are at risk of suffering Blue Baby Syndrome, an affliction caused by consuming excess nitrates.

Tilden said the company is going to connect two wells via pipeline, mixing the contaminated water with safe water. He said the mixture should be well under maximum levels set by the Environmental Protection Agency. However, Tilden said it could take up to six months to complete the connection, including all of the required permitting.

Arizona American is scheduled to meet with the Desert Hills Homeowner Association in April.

According to the company, boiling, freezing or filtering the water should not reduce nitrate levels. However, it said "well maintained" reverse osmosis systems should remove most of the nitrates.

Patrick Gibbons, spokesman for ADEQ, said high nitrate levels are typically caused by septic system discharge. In 1997, a similar situation in Lake Havasu City was attributed to septic tanks.

Arizona American said it has limited bottled water available to customers. Customers with questions or concerns can call Arizona American Water at (800) 383-0834.

You may contact the reporter at mhall@havasunews.com.

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